

# L1c) The Philosophy of the Curriculum.

## By Dr Robert Rose

In the following slides, you will see the general curriculum aspect of how in Steiner education there is a gradual emergence of the parts from the whole. This is only a general trend however in that, as we will see, there is a striving for wholeness in each of the subject areas.

When one considers the content of what needs to be taught in any school, i.e. what one should teach children about, the most obvious answer is “the World”. But the World is a very diverse and large place and effectively impossible to teach about all at once. So the question is: how should the teaching about the World be divided up into distinct subjects? To a significant degree, this depends on how different levels of reality of the World are distinguished. In the first slide, the image represents how Steiner divided the whole of reality into its constituent parts and which have corresponding parts in the curriculum, as well as unique research methods and types of explanation (see modules 2 & 3). The second and third slides give a brief overview of how the curriculum can be interpreted as involving the Humanities and the Nature curricula which diversify over time from the whole to the parts.

Steiner Curriculum	Level of Reality	Type of Research Method		Type of Explanation	
Humanities: History, Human Geography, Art, Music, Eurythmy, Literature, Drama, Philosophy, Sociology.	The Human Spirit or “I”, also conceived as the “Individuality” as the agent of learning as well as the true Self.	Self Knowledge, Self- Transformation Art as World Transformation	Cultural / Humanities Research Method	The Individual and Society	
Psychology (also as Humanities)	The Soul (Psyche) as thinking, feeling, willing, imagination, memory, perception	Psychological: Self-Knowledge		Matter as Image of the Idea	
Biology, Life Sciences	The Life Processes.	Organic Method: Evolutionary / Comparative		The Organic Type The Eco-System	
Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics	The Physical Realm.	Inorganic Method: Proof / Conditionality / Causation		The Natural Law Cosmos	

# Humanities and Nature Curricula

A different way of representing this is (see also Avison and Rawson 2014):

Humanities Curriculum	Nature Curriculum
<b>Cultural, Social &amp; Artistic Studies</b> Literature & Literacy & Language Drama History Human Geography Art, Music, Eurythmy Philosophy Sociology Psychology	<b>Organic Sciences:</b> Natural Geography Botany Zoology Gardening and Farming <b>Inorganic Sciences:</b> Building Physics Chemistry Mathematics

Expressed as a sequence in time this may lead to:

# A Possible General Steiner Curriculum: Wholes to Parts



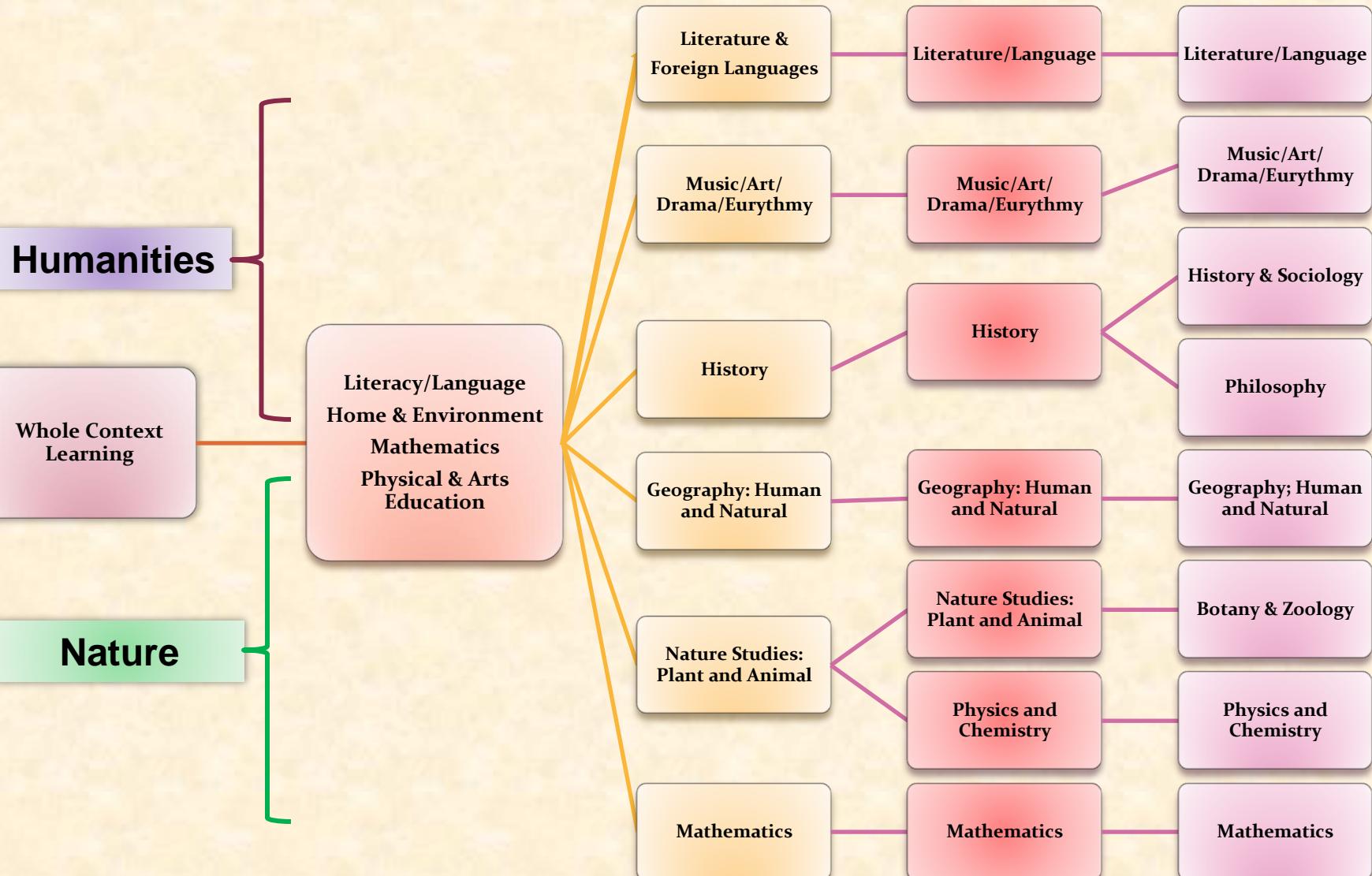
Kindergarten

Classes 1-3

Classes 3-6

Classes 6-8

Upper School

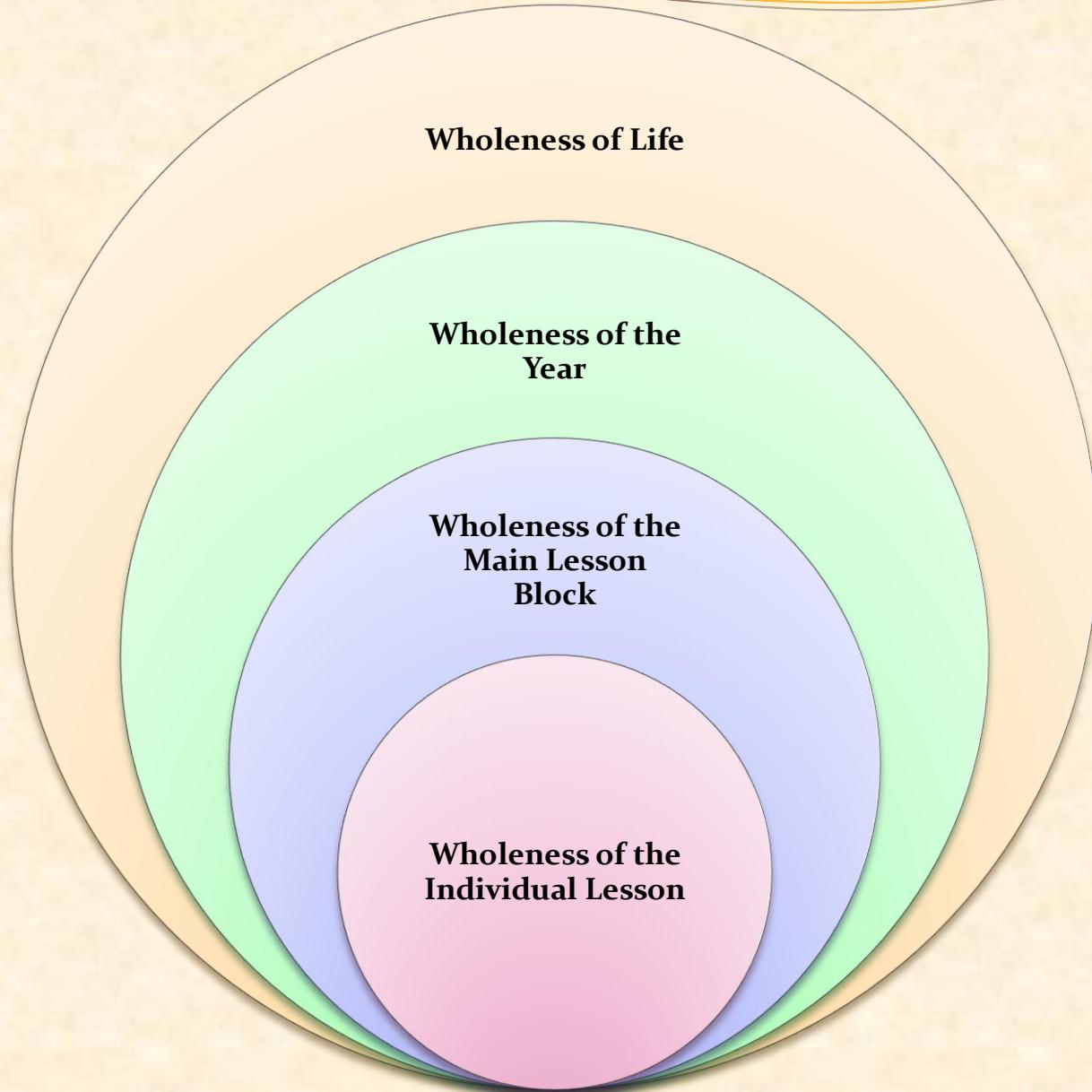


### 3) Wholeness Over Time and the Form of the Education

In Steiner / Waldorf Education, the aim, the form of the year, days, the individual lessons and the week are ultimately derived from an understanding of the wholeness of the threefold human nature. This ordering is not always possible in practice, but Steiner recommended these basic forms to be striven for. In the first case, Steiner conceived of the **aim** of the education as a type of wholeness over time:

“The first point we had to consider was how to make the most of the available **time** for teaching, especially in regard to the development of the student’s soul life... The **aim** of Waldorf education is to arrange all of the teaching so that within the shortest possible time the maximum amount of material can be presented to students by the simplest means possible. This helps children retain an **overall view** of their subjects - not so much intellectually, but very much in their feeling life.” Steiner, R (2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 117/8. (My bold)

So the goal of the education is to provide a kind of wholeness in terms of the subjects to be learned over a time period. We can see in the following a simplified view of Steiner’s ideas as a series of nested wholes, more details of which follow:



A means to achieve this “Wholeness” in Steiner Education is through different types and levels of wholeness through the **form of the time** used to structure the learning process. We will consider this next.

### 3.1) Types of Lessons in Steiner Education: a Human Wholeness

Steiner Education can be seen as incorporating three types of lessons which reflect the three psychological aspects of the human being: Knowing / Thinking, Feeling and Willing. Embedded in these are distinct learning methods:

Type of Lesson	Focal Human Faculty / Learning Method
1) Main Lesson	“Knowing”, but also with Feeling and Will.
2) Subject Lesson	“Thinking”, but also with Will and Feeling.
3) Artistic / Physical Lessons	Will and Feeling.

## 3.2) The Form of the Day

In the context of the lower school, another aspect of is the **Form of the Day** as can be seen in his discussion about the so-called subject lessons:

“During the remaining hours of the morning, the other lessons are taught, and here **foreign languages** play the most important part... Another very important subject for this stage is handwork, which includes **several crafts**... Another subject taught during morning sessions could be called “**worldview**”... Religion, after all, is at the very core of a person’s worldview. Consequently, in our Waldorf school, a Roman Catholic priest was asked to give Roman Catholic religion lessons to students of that denomination, and a Protestant minister teaches Protestant religion lessons”. Steiner, R (2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 124. (My bold)

So the morning form is to be divided into two parts, the first is the main lesson and the second is what has come to be called the subject lessons. In this context, Steiner refers to three subject lessons: foreign languages, Crafts and Worldview (sometimes called the religion lesson, but in reality is more like what mainstream education today calls “Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC)”).

For Steiner there is an implicit connection to a growing wholeness in the education:

“If you have made such a worldview your own and linked it to practical life, you will not become theoretical and alienated from life but a skilled and capable person... Those who must deal with **theoretical** work should place themselves within **practical life** even more firmly than those who happen to be tailors, cobblers, or engineers. In my opinion, imparting theoretical knowledge is acceptable only when the other person is well versed in the practical matters of life; otherwise, such ideas remain alien to life.” Steiner, R (2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 123. (My bold).

From this, one may see that there is a particular form to this in that the subject lessons should attempt to balance out the **conceptual** “Worldview” element with the **will** based “Crafts” “practical” element.

As we will see, this becomes a part of the forming principle for the structure of the day:

“The **afternoon lessons** are given over to more **physical activities**, such as **gym** and **eurhythmy**, and to **artistic** work, which plays a very special part in a Waldorf school. I will give further details of this in the coming days. We try, as much as possible, to teach the more **intellectual** subjects in the **morning**, and only when the headwork is done are they given movement lessons, insofar as they have not let off steam already between morning lessons. However, after the movement lessons they are not taken back to the classroom to do more headwork.” Steiner, R (2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 131. (My bold).

We now have the emerging **Day Form** based on the wholeness of human nature, i.e. in knowing/thinking, feeling and willing:

Day Form: Time Frame Possibilities	Type of Lesson	Focal Human Faculty / Learning Method
8.30 – 10.30	Main Lesson	“Knowing”, but also with Feeling and Will.
11.00 – 12.30	Subject Lessons: Languages, World Views (e.g. Religion), Crafts	“Thinking”, but also with Will and Feeling.
13.30 – 15.30	Artistic / Physical Lessons: Gym, Eurythmy, Farming / Gardening / Building.	Will and Feeling.

### 3.3) The Wholeness of Life

Most generally, Steiner wanted the learning from the curriculum to be integrated into a type growing process throughout the **whole of life** and not be fixed in past forms:

“Therefore all the **concepts** we introduce, all the **feelings** we invoke, and all **will** impulses we give must be treated with the same care and foresight we use to clothe our children. We should not expect them to remember abstract definitions for the rest of their lives. At the age of forty five, your little finger will not be the same as it was when you were eight, and likewise, concepts introduced at the age of eight should not remain unchanged by the time students reach the age of forty-five. We must approach the child’s organism so that the **various members** can **grow and expand**.” Steiner, R (2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 120. (My bold)

So for Steiner, education is for the whole of life and for the whole of human nature: thinking, feeling and willing. The aim is for an ongoing growth throughout a whole “life-time” and not to be fixed in a past time-moment, or a part of time.

Steiner also made the case that presenting the children with a view across the whole of their school life to the time of their leaving is of significant value to them – ***even in the very first lesson:***

“You must regard the first lesson you have with your students in every class as extremely significant. In a certain sense a far more important element will emanate from this first lesson than from all the others... You are faced, then, with a class of all sorts of children. The first thing to do is to draw their attention to the reason they are there in the classroom. It is very important that you should speak to the children somewhat in this vein: “You have come to school, and now I am going to tell you why you have come to school.” This act of coming to school should immediately be drawn to their attention. “You have come to school in order to learn something. You have as yet no idea of all the things you will be learning in school, but there will be all sorts of subjects that you will have to learn. Why will you have to learn all sorts of different things in school? You no doubt know some adults, some grown-up people, and you must have noticed that they can do things that you cannot do. You are here so that **one day you will also be able to do what grown-ups can do.** One day you will be able to do things that you cannot do yet.”” Steiner, R (1919): Practical Advice to Teachers, Anthroposophic Press, p.47/8. 9My bold)

For Steiner then, it is important for the teacher to present the children with a holistic view of their future in the context of schooling. This also gives them some indication of their life as an adult.

Steiner goes on to say:

“For this reason, the suggested conversation with the children, which you can expand on as you wish, should continue along the following lines: “Look how grown-ups have books and can read. You can’t read yet, but you will learn to read. When you have learned how to read you will also be able to take books and learn from them as grown-ups learn from them. Adults can write letters to each other; in fact, they can write down anything they like. Soon you will also be able to write letters, because you will also learn to write. Besides reading and writing, grown-ups can also do arithmetic. You don’t yet know what doing arithmetic means. But you have to be able to do arithmetic when you go out into life, for instance, if you want to buy something to eat or to wear or if you want to make something to wear.”” Steiner, R (1919): Practical Advice to Teachers, Anthroposophic Press, p.49/50.

The aim of this is to raise into the child’s consciousness the reason why they are in school, from the general to the specific:

“It is most important in teaching and education to bring - if I may put it this way - **consciously into consciousness** what otherwise remains a force of habit in life” Steiner, R (1919): Practical Advice to Teachers, Rudolf Steiner Press, p. 58. (My bold).

By this means Steiner argued that the children will then become conscious of why they are at school and that this will affect the whole of their life.

### 3.4) Preparation Time as a Wholeness

A teacher's **preparation** plays a vital role in the creation of an educational wholeness. This includes the teacher's creation of a holistic **framework**, or preview, of the whole teaching activity to come:

"After methodical preparation at home, a teacher can cultivate within a fine feeling for the **salient facts**, which then become a kind of **framework** for this period. The teacher allows these to work upon the soul, thus enabling the students to remember them without much difficulty. All additional material will then fall into place more or less naturally. If one masters the subject in this way, we can say without exaggerating that, in only three to four lessons, it is quite possible to give students something that might otherwise take half a year, and even in greater depth so that the students retain a lasting impression of the subject". Steiner, R (2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 118. (My bold)

### 3.5) The Lesson Starting Point and Mood as a Wholeness

Another of these is the **starting point** of an individual lesson being a kind of “moment wholeness” in terms of the **feeling mood** generated to hold the whole of the lesson:

“When they assemble in their classrooms, the teachers bring them together by saying a morning verse in chorus with the whole class. This verse, which could also be sung, embraces both a **general** human and a religious element, and it **unites** the students in a **mood** of prayer. It may be followed by a genuine prayer. In our “free” Waldorf school, such details are left entirely up to each teacher.” Steiner, R (2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 119. (My bold)

Furthermore, Steiner saw the verse or poem or song as something that should be integrated into the subjects taught and which may be seen as a means to bind them into a wholeness:

“You will protest that interpretation is necessary if the children are to understand the poem. I would counter that **all the lessons must be structured to form a totality**. This has to be discussed in the weekly meetings of the teachers. If a poem is to be recited, then the other lessons must encompass whatever might be necessary to shed light on the poem.” Steiner, R (2000): Practical Advice to Teachers, Anthroposophic Press, p. 43. (My emphasis)

### 3.6) The Holistic Form of the Week, Block and Year

The concept of wholeness plays also into Steiner's concept of how the, **weeks, year are structured**:

"Then begins our so-called main lesson, which lasts nearly two hours... Thus, during the first two hours of the morning, students are taught the same subject in "block" periods, each lasting four to six weeks... Thus one introduces the various main lesson subjects according to the principles we agreed on, which include a carefully planned economy of the children's soul life. At all costs, one must avoid too much stress on the mind and soul of the child... During the four to six weeks of a main lesson block, the class teacher will always try to present the material as a complete chapter - an **artistic whole** - that children can take into later life... And it goes without saying that, toward the end of the school year before the approaching summer holidays, all the main lesson subjects taught during the year should be **woven together** into a short, artistic **recapitulation**... "

Steiner, R (2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 120. (My bold)

From this we can see how Steiner envisaged the days and weeks as a type of **artistic wholeness** of the individual main lesson blocks. Moreover, he conceived the end of the year as a recapitulation of these wholes and a creation of a **higher whole** through the integration of the individual blocks by being "woven together".

### 3.7) The Individual Lesson Form as a Wholeness

Going into more detail of the **Lesson Form**, we also find that each **individual** main lesson is also organised around a three stage process that reflects the different levels of the human being. On the example of a physics lesson, although the process is can be considered more general, Steiner states:

“Remember what I said yesterday: Our thinking, our mental pictures, are head processes, while it is the rhythmic human being who judges, and the metabolic human being who draws conclusions.... [For example] I make an experiment. The **whole of the human being** is occupied, is asked to make an effort. This is quite enough to begin with. I then draw the children’s attention away from the instruments I experimented with and repeat the various stages. Here I am appealing to their **memory** of the direct **experience**. During such a review or recapitulation—without the presence of the apparatus, purely in the mind—the rhythmic system is especially enlivened.... After having engrossed the whole of the human being, I now appeal to the rhythmic system, and to the head system, because the head naturally participates during recapitulation. The lesson can then be concluded.... Remember the progression: I teach a physics lesson, make an experiment, then recapitulate the stages of the experiment without the apparatus. **On the following day**, we discuss the previous experiment, contemplate it, reflect on it. The children are to learn the **inherent laws**. The **cognitive** element, **thinking**, is now employed...” Steiner, R (1996): Education for Adolescents, Anthroposophic Press, p. 49/50. (My bold)

There is then a threefoldness that is also present in each individual main lesson, but in a somewhat modified form. Whilst it is often thought by academics that the learning process is a purely cognitive activity, Steiner makes the case that within learning the **all** soul faculties, of thinking (cognitive), feeling and willing, as well as perception, should also be present. Consequently, the main lesson will include elements that appeal, or are adapted, to thinking, feeling, perception and willing. These provide the primary capacities around which the individual lessons are constructed:

1) **The first stage** of the learning process begins by appealing to the “whole human being”, i.e. in that perception, thinking, feeling and willing are all engaged at an initial level.



2) **The second stage** is without the perceptual element, but involves memory, feeling and thought on second level, this includes a question and answer element, i.e. a basic discussion (but it is not reflection as such).



3) **The third stage**, on the next day, is a predominantly a thinking or an age specific cognitive activity. This is a kind of reflecting on what has been done activity. (This can also be extended over greater periods and would usually include pupil activities and thereafter assessment, see power point L1f on Pupil Assessment p. 4).

After this, the whole process may begin again, possibly even on the second day, thus providing the primary conditions for forming the week and the three or four or six week main lesson block.

Moreover, it has to be said, that what counts as “cognitive” is derived from the age phase specific learning principle discussed in module 3. For instance, the concept of “cognitive” in the lower school is principally the idea of imagination (with the three specialised forms discussed), whilst in the upper school it is that of independent judgement.

There is also another point to be made in that this **three-stage process** can be interpreted in a number of ways. In the above quote, it appears to be a two-day process, whilst some Steiner Educators have interpreted it as a three or more day process. Clearly, each individual teacher will need to exercise their own insight into what is most appropriate for their situation.

In general, this gives the following “form in principle” to the main lesson:

Main Lesson Form (8.30 to 10.30)	Focal Human Faculty appealed to:
<p><b>Part 1:</b> Poem or a song preview.</p> <p>Teaching Activity: Telling a story, showing an experiment, recounting history, etc.</p> <p>Pupil Learning: Cognitive, Artistic, Practical Activities.</p>	<p><b>Whole Human Being:</b> Head, Rhythmic, Metabolic / Limb Systems: - Perception, Memory / Feeling, Thinking, Will.</p>
<p><b>Part 2:</b> Recall / Discussion – Feeling Activity</p>	<p>Rhythmic System: - Memory with Feeling, but also with thinking.</p>
<p><b>Part 3:</b> Contemplative Activity (age phase appropriate type) on the second day of the process. This can also be extended to further periods of time and include pupil learning activities.</p>	<p>Head System: Cognition – Thinking.</p>

From out of this it is possible to build up an example of a one week learning process that may be extended to each week of a 3 to 6 week main lesson block (**there may be many other ways of interpreting this each justifiable in their own way**):

<p><b>Days of the Week.</b> <b>The 2 hour main lesson.</b></p>	<h1>Main Lesson Elements</h1>
<p><b>Day 1</b></p>	<p><b>Part 1: (new material):</b> Poem or a song preview. Teaching Activity - Pupil Learning: Cognitive, Artistic, Practical Activities.</p> <p><b>Part 2:</b> Recall / Discussion – Feeling Activity</p>
<p><b>Day 2</b></p>	<p><b>Part 3:</b> Contemplative Activity – Deeper Pupil learning activities.</p> <p><b>Part 1:(new material) :</b> Poem or a song preview. Teaching Activity - Pupil Learning: Cognitive, Artistic, Practical Activities.</p> <p><b>Part 2:</b> Recall / Discussion – Feeling Activity</p>
<p><b>Day 3</b></p>	<p><b>Part 3:</b> Contemplative Activity – Deeper Pupil learning activities</p> <p><b>Part 1 :(new material) :</b> Poem or a song preview. Teaching Activity -Pupil Learning: Cognitive, Artistic, Practical Activities.</p> <p><b>Part 2:</b> Recall / Discussion – Feeling Activity</p>
<p><b>Day 4</b></p>	<p><b>Part 3:</b> Contemplative Activity – Deeper Pupil learning activities</p> <p><b>Part 1: (new material) :</b> Poem or a song preview. Teaching Activity - Pupil Learning: Cognitive, Artistic, Practical Activities.</p> <p><b>Part 2:</b> Recall / Discussion – Feeling Activity</p>
<p><b>Day 5</b></p>	<p><b>Part 3:</b> Contemplative Activity – Deepening pupil learning activities leading to possible assessment.</p> <p><b>One possibility at this point is that the pupil's work may be assessed and documented by the teacher.</b></p>

## 4) Holism in Educational Method

When a teacher considers how they will **begin** a particular sequence of teaching they may wonder about what they will begin with: the part or the whole. In, say, science teaching, should the teacher begin with the parts, such as the atomic structure of metals, or the specific parts of a machine; or in language should they begin with parts of words, or whole words, or whole sentences? This **beginning point** is also a question of holism and reductionism as **educational methods**.

So what kind of holistic education did Steiner promote? As can be seen below, Steiner did not recommend just teaching about “wholes” at the expense of “parts”, rather he saw education as beginning with wholes, working towards the parts and then back to the wholes again. Why did he think this, again due to his views on whole human nature:

“If we look at the activity of a human soul, we see two things. The first is a tendency toward **analysis** and the second is a tendency toward **synthesis**... If the activity of the human soul were solely synthetic—that is, if human beings were connected with the external world in such a way that they could *only synthesize*, they could only form concepts of species and so forth—we could hardly speak of human freedom. Everything would be determined by external nature... **When analyzing, I carry out a completely free inner activity.** When synthesizing, I am required by the external world to unfold the life in my soul in a particular way... And yet it is just this analytical activity that is normally taken too little into account in teaching and education. We are more likely to take the view that the external world demands synthesis.” Steiner, R (1920/2001): *The Renewal of Education*, Anthroposophic Press, pp. 167-9 (My emphasis)

For Steiner, the activities of synthesis and analysis are not only thinking activities, they have their ground in the feeling part of human nature. It is the **desire** for both of these which is a kind of semi-wholeness in the feeling realm and education needs to satisfy both:

“Materialism is encouraged by a failure to satisfy our **desire** for analysis. If we satisfied the impulse to analyze in the way that I have described here, we would certainly keep people from sympathizing with the materialistic worldview.” Steiner, R (1920/2001): *The Renewal of Education*, Anthroposophic Press (p. 170/1)

But it is not just a question of desire either, analysis and synthesis affect the development of consciousness:

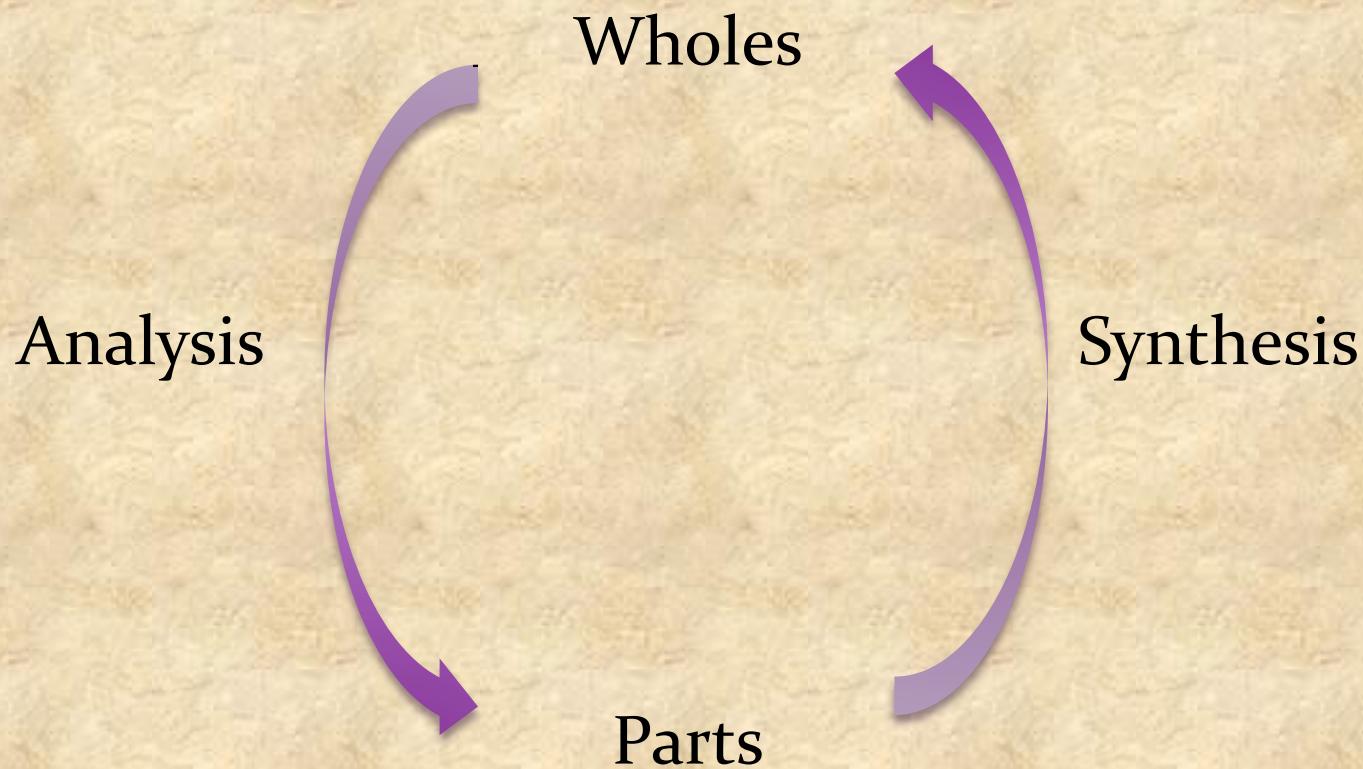
“We awaken the child’s **consciousness** by analyzing sentences and words... Children whose tendency to analyze is accepted develop a greater awareness than is generally the case in today’s population.” Steiner, R (1920/2001): *The Renewal of Education*, Anthroposophic Press p. 171. (My emphasis)

For Steiner, the whole process consists not just in proceeding from the whole to the part, but also to return to the whole. For him, education should utilise both analysis and synthesis in order to help develop the whole of human nature.

“We need to become aware of what actually wants to develop out of the child’s individuality. **First** we need to know what can be drawn out of the child. At the outset children have a desire to be satisfied analytically; **then** they want to bring that analysis together through synthesis. We must take these things into account by looking at human nature.” Steiner, R (1920/2001): *The Renewal of Education*, Anthroposophic Press p. 174. (My emphasis)

The next slides provide a brief overview of the role of analysis and synthesis in Steiner/ Waldorf Education:

# Between the Wholes and the Parts: From Analysis to Synthesis



In the following lectures, we will consider these forms of holism in Steiner Education in the general areas of the Humanities and Nature & Science curriculum.

It would be good now to read the Power Point Lectures L1d, L1e and L1f to give yourself another overview of the curriculum in Steiner / Waldorf Schools and as an introduction to assessment.

# Summary: Types of Educational Wholeness Over Time

Type of Time Wholeness	Character of Time Wholeness
<b>1) Wholeness of the Total Curriculum</b>	From Whole to Parts and to an enriched Whole.
<b>2) Wholeness of the Preparation and Preview</b>	Creating the archetypal Idea of the holistic teaching of the thinking, feeling and willing (cf body, soul & spirit; head, heart, hands, etc) in relation to a specific subject.
<b>3) Wholeness of the First Teaching Moment</b>	Creating the mood for the whole lesson.
<b>4) Wholeness of the Individual Lessons</b>	Creating a time form for learning from Whole Being, to Rhythmic Feeling to Thinking.
<b>5) Wholeness in Synthesis and Analysis of Lessons</b>	Creating rhythmic wholeness in the unified soul.
<b>6) Wholeness of the Day</b>	Creating a time form for learning from the cognitive to feeling and then willing
<b>7) Wholeness of the Main Lesson Block</b>	Creating an artistic wholeness of salient ideas in the individual main lesson blocks.
<b>8) Wholeness of the Year in Review</b>	Creating an artistic, unified and recapitulated wholeness of all the year's main lesson blocks.
<b>9) Wholeness of Life: the Aim of Education</b>	Creating a growing wholeness in Independent thinking, feeling and willing throughout life.

## Exercises

On the basis of the texts found here:

- 1) Draw out a plan for a day and week teaching process.
- 2) Devise a main lesson of a two hour period.
- 3) How would you prepare a main lesson?
- 4) Develop a main lesson block (e.g. a three to six week period) on a subject of your own choosing.
- 5) Describe what you might do in your very first teaching session. You might like to read chapter 4 from: Steiner, R (1919): Practical Advice to Teachers, Anthroposophic Press.

Write a few paragraphs on each and make schematic plans.